



Al-Risala 1994

July

Serendipity

Man can discover the awesome splendour of the godhead only if he engrosses himself totally in his Creator.

Horace Walpole (1717-1797), the renowned Englishman of letters, once finding himself at a loss for an exact expression for the faculty of making happy or unexpected discoveries by accident, coined the word serendipity, deriving it from the title of a fairy tale, "The Three Princes of Serendip" (In Sri Lanka). The word thereupon entered the English language and, since 1754, has become a habitually used expression, since there do seem individuals who possess such a faculty and important discoveries have often been made in this way. One such discovery was penicillin, made in 1928 by Sir Alexander Fleming, a Scottish scientist who shared the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1945 with Chain and Florey.

But serendipity is not all that it takes to produce a great discovery. Taunted by the remark that the discoveries made by scientists were not really their own achievements, but the result of chance, the distinguished Indian Scientist, Sir C. V. Raman retorted, "That is true. But chance of this nature only happens to scientists!"

Discovery results primarily from a finely tuned concentration of the mind. The more keenly one's attention is focussed on any given subject, the more alive one becomes to its hidden subtleties. In this way, the genuine scientist, involved as he is, day and night, with the object of his research, develops such a close mental affinity for it, that he is able, inevitably, to progress from partial to absolute truths.

What holds for scientific discovery is no less true of spiritual discovery, and, for man, the greatest discovery he can make is God. But just as the scientist can make his discoveries only if he immerses himself totally in his subject, so can man discover the awesome splendour of the godhead only if he engrosses himself totally in his Creator.

Discovery of God comes from giving one's entire mind to God. It is only when one turns resolutely away from this material world in order to contemplate the divine processes of nature, that one becomes aware, in every fibre of one's being, of the magnificence of the Supreme Reality.

Peace and justice for all

A political revolution can have meaning only if it is preceded by, and consistently upheld by a moral revolution. No revolution is worth the name unless it brings in its wake peace and justice for all.

During the time of his imprisonment by the British in the Ahmad Nagar Fort, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru wrote his famous book, *The Discovery of India*, between the months of April and September, 1944. It is significant that the postscript he added on the 29th of December, 1945 concludes with the words:

"We are on the eve of general elections in India and these elections absorb attention. But the elections will be over soon – and then? The coming year is likely to be one of storm and trouble, of conflict and turmoil. There is going to be no peace in India or elsewhere except on the basis of freedom." (pp. 693, 694).

Approximately one and a half years after these lines were written, India did gain its independence, and Jawahar Lal Nehru had the opportunity to govern the country single-handed till the end of his life. Those who had been closely associated with him remained in power even after his death. But that precious quality of life called 'peace' is further away today than ever it seemed in December, 1945. India has gained its freedom, but it has certainly not gained peace.

Changes of leadership have done little to amend this situation. Zealous leaders have too often equated a change in the status quo with betterment, progress, the weal of the common man, only to find that their aspirations have been illusory. Most often, such changes only bring new faces to the political scene, without there being any improvement, either qualitative or quantitative, in the existing state of affairs.

A political revolution can have meaning only if it is preceded by, and consistently upheld by a moral revolution, its genuine fruits should be not just changes in the wielders of power, but changes in attitudes and behaviour from the top to the bottom of the social and political hierarchy. No revolution is worth the name unless it brings in its wake peace and justice for all.

4 July 1994

Those who show mercy will be dealt with mercifully

"The Merciful One shows mercy to the merciful," said the Prophet. "Be merciful with those on earth. The One in Heaven will be merciful with you."

(Ahmad, Abu Da'ud, At-Tirmidhi)

'Would that I were dust!'

When 'Umar, the second Caliph, was dying, – struck down by the dagger of Abu Lulu Firoz, – he laid his head in the lap of his son, Abdullah ibn 'Umar. 'Umar said to him, "Rub my cheek in the dust, Abdullah," and his son did as he was asked. Then with his head resting on the ground, 'Umar uttered these words to himself: "Woe betide you, 'Umar, and woe betide the one who gave birth to you if God does not forgive you." (*Tabaqat Thn Sa'ad*)

Before he had breathed his last, 'Umar, like a true believer, wished to be joined with the dust, and thought in fear and trembling what God's judgement of him would be in the life after death. How different are the unbelievers who give no thought to such matters until it is too late – until they stand before their Maker on the Day of Judgement. The believer bows to God while He is yet invisible. The unbeliever bows to God only when He reveals Himself to him. The Qur'an gives ample warning to him with the verse: "That day is sure to come. Let him who will, seek a way back to his Lord. We have forewarned you of an imminent scourge: the day when a man will look upon his works and the unbeliever cry: 'Would that I were dust!'"

5 July 1994

ISLAM AS IT IS

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

In Islam As It Is, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan presents the fundamental teachings of Islam in a manner which will appeal directly to both general readers and students of Islam.

Simple and straightforward in style, Islam As It Is gives the reader an accurate and comprehensive picture of Islam – the true religion of submission to God.

Rising to the occasion

The true Muslim does not need to be punished to make him refrain from misdeeds. Faith produces a positive response to the merest hint or reminder about defaulting.

While the Battle of Qadsia was raging, Abu Mehjan Thaqafi, one of the bravest soldiers in the Muslim army found himself chained up, a prisoner in his own tent, because his Commander, Sa'ad ibn Abi Waqqas had been constrained to punish him for his indulgence in liquor. The Muslims were having difficulty in resisting the determined attacks of the Persians. Abu Mehjan was beside himself when he discovered that Sa'ad was wounded and heard him issuing instructions to the army from a vantage point near his tent. "Alas that horses and spears should be doing battle, and I should be left out, tied up in chains." It was then that he conceived the idea of sending a message to Sa'ad's wife to have his chains removed and to let him have Sa'ad's horse and weapons. With the promise that if his life was spared, the moment the battle was over, he would immediately put on his chains again. She agreed to this and so Abu Mehjan was able to charge out into the battle, valiantly fighting enemy soldiers while Sa'ad ibn abi Waqqas looked on in wonderment at the feats of this intrepid horseman. The Muslims finally emerged victorious, and Abu Mehjan, true to his promise, returned Sa'ad's horse and sword and went back into the confinement of his tent. When Sa'ad went home he remarked to his wife that it was a man – sent by God – riding on a spotted horse who had saved the day: 'If I hadn't trusted Abu Mehjan up in chains, I would have thought it was he, for only he can charge in that way!"

Sa'ad's wife then told him the whole story, with the result that Abu Mehjan was promptly released from his chains and Sa'ad made a pledge to him never again to punish him for drinking. For his part, Abu Mehjan Thaqafi promised never to drink again.

The true Muslim does not need to be punished to make him refrain from misdeeds. Faith produces a positive response to the merest hint or reminder about defaulting. Only one who is totally devoid of these qualities will be deaf to entreaties and insensitive to rebuke.

7 July 1994

On hearing the Hereafter mentioned, he waived his claim

Umm Salama tells of how two Jo' the Ansar brought a dispute before the Prophet about a long-standing issue of inheritance for which neither party could produce a witness. "You bring me your disputes," the Prophet said to them, "and, when no proper evidence is brought forward, I judge them according to my own way of thinking. I might, on the basis of partial evidence, make a settlement in favour of one of the parties, but in so doing, it may be that I take away from the other what is his rightful due. In that case, the one is whose favour I pass judgement should not accept what has been apportioned to him, for that would be like his accepting a firebrand which, on the Day of Resurrection, would stick on his neck." At these words, both the Ansar broke down and wept. "Prophet of God!" they both cried out, "he can have my rightful share!" "The Prophet then told them that in view of their changed attitude they should go and, seeking to do what was just and right, should divide the inheritance into two parts. Then they should draw lots as to who should have which part. In this way, each would have the other's approval of the share he received.

(Kanz al-Umma)

Reward and punishment

Justice is only partially obtainable in this world: absolute justice is attainable only in the life hereafter.

The ugly and ill-tempered hero of *Dostoevsky's novel, "Crime and Punishment" murders an old woman without heirs in order to further his education by means of her ever-increasing but unavailed of wealth. The other characters in the novel, and, of course, the reader, cannot but hold him guilty of a heinous crime. The old woman's wealth was as tempting to the murderer as the flesh of a deer is to a lion. But when a lion kills a deer to eat its flesh, a certain amount of sentimental concern may be shown, but no one would seriously raise this kind of killing as a moral issue. No one would feel the urge to frame laws prohibiting such acts. On the contrary, when a man commits a similar offence, society as a whole joins in protest and efforts are made to ensure that the murderer does not go unpunished.

This is because man, although often as instinctive in conduct as the predatory animals, is superior in moral status to them, in that he is capable of distinguishing right from wrong, and is, therefore, expected by society to act in accordance both with the laws of the land and the dictates of his own conscience. If he fails to do so, he must expect, in his capacity as an ethical being, to be brought before a court of law.

The guilty of conscience, however, are not invariably brought to justice. This is because there exists no temporal court, with an all-seeing eye, which can unfailingly dispense justice on all the myriad occasions on which it warranted. At best, the courts set up by human beings can try only a certain number of identifiable offenders, and many are the wrongdoers who go scot-free because their crimes are never discovered, because they are able to cover up their offences, because they find loopholes in man-made laws or because they are able to use their wealth in order to corrupt. Justice is only partially obtainable in this world: absolute justice is attainable only in the life hereafter.

Take the case of 34 year old Gerson Viloria, a Philippino Treasury clerk, who had a case registered against him for forgery. After lengthy court proceedings, he was held guilty in 17 cases by the judge, Mr. Romeo M Escareal. Since Philippine law lays down 10 years of rigorous imprisonment for each such crime committed, the accused found himself sentenced to 170 years of rigorous imprisonment and a penalty of \$ 4,625. If he was unable to pay the penalty, his term of punishment was to be extended. (*The Times of India*, 9 November, 1979).

The culprit at the time of sentencing was 34 years of age. Even if he lived to a ripe old age, there would still be about a hundred years left for him to serve. He would never, therefore, in the eyes of the law,

fully expiate his crimes. Our world is too limited by human mortality for there to be any possibility of total justice.

In a similar case in Thailand, a case was filed against a policewoman, a Mrs. Phenphanchong Imsap, who had been posted in the frontier region of Pelchabun where she was in charge of the registration office for foreigners. The court found her guilty of earning \$25,000 illegally over a period of 17 years by accepting bribes for registration. She was then sentenced to 1000 years of rigorous imprisonment, with no possibility of being released on parole or being granted mercy. In the judge's view such punishment would serve as a preventive to others.

Clearly, this policewoman was not going to stay alive for one thousand years to serve her full term, but since it was felt that a criminal's punishment should be in direct proportion to the magnitude of his crime, this verdict expressed the court's desire for total justice.

In the present world, no judge, however well-intentioned, can ever hope for anything more than partial justice in a large proportion of the cases he presides over. If, to expiate his crimes, a criminal must serve a prison term of 1000 years, his death is going to provide him with an escape route. This inexorable reality calls for the existence of an unlimited world in which man is granted so long a life that he can never escape the full consequences of his deeds. Since, in human terms, this is an impossibility in the present world, we must seek true justice in the eternity of the after-life.

10 July 1994

ISLAM: CREATOR OF THE MODERN AGE

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Antiquity was an age of superstition: the present age is of science. Before reaching its present-day zenith, the modern, scientific age had to pass through three stages. The first was marked by the eradication of the superstitious mentality, the second saw the practical beginnings of scientific research; the third is the spectacular culmination of the scientific process in the second half of the twentieth century. The present volume examines the Islamic contribution to the completion of the first two stages during the millennium immediately following upon the emergence of Islam.

Putting humility before self-righteousness

"Mosques are for the remembrance of God. It is not appropriate to conduct worldly conversations therein."

One day, in Delhi, I was going down the stairs of the mosque after my morning prayers when someone, also on his way out, asked me, "Didn't you see that man praying with his sleeves rolled up above his elbows?" Without waiting for me to reply, he added, "Keeping God and the Devil happy at one fell swoop! God save us from such worshippers." As he spoke, his tone and manner exuded hatred and scorn.

I thought to myself: "How ironic that people should take away from the House of God the lesson of pride, and not of humility; they know that elbows should not be exposed, but do not know that one Muslim is duty-bound to show respect for another. How can a Muslim think he is within his rights in looking down on a Muslim brother and in talking of him with contempt and loathing?" But that, unfortunately, is the way Muslims behave nowadays.

We would do well to cast our minds back to the way the Prophet of God dealt with such situations, one such incident being related in the one of the six correct books of traditions, *Sahih* of Imam Muslim. It seems that a man who had recently converted to Islam, not being fully apprised of the etiquette to be observed during prayers, began to talk during congregational prayers in the Prophet's mosque in Medina. He was regarded with an air of disapproval by the worshippers all around him, one of them even going so far as to smack him on the knee to make him be silent. Later, however, when the prayer was over, the Prophet of God addressed him with such sublime gentleness that the culprit later recalled: "By God, I have never seen, before or after, a better teacher than he. He did not become angry with me, nor did he insult me, but simply told me; 'Mosques are for the remembrance of God. It is not appropriate to conduct worldly conversations therein.'"

12 July 1994

Rising above love and hate

When the Prophet emigrated from Mecca to Medina, the keys of the House of God in Mecca were in the custody of one Uthman ibn abu Talhah, they having remained in the keeping of his family for several generations. One day, the Prophet asked Uthman for the keys, but the latter refused to hand them over, and spoke rudely to him. They Prophet heard him out but all he said finally was: "Uthman, perhaps you will live to see the day when I shall have these keys in my hands. I shall then be in a position to give them unto whom I will." "It will be a day of disgrace and woe for the Quraysh when the keys of the Kabah are in the hands of one such as you" replied Uthman.

After the conquest of Mecca, God's Messenger reigned supreme there, and asked for the keys of the Kabah to be handed over to him. When the keys were actually in his hands, his own cousin and son-in-law, Ali ibn Abu Talib, arose and asked for them to be given to him. The Prophet however, did not respond. Instead, he summoned Uthman ibn Talhah, when he stood before him, the Prophet handed him the keys, saying, "Here are your keys, Uthman. This is a day of righteousness and fulfillment of promises."

(Ibn Qayyim, *Zad ai-Ma'ad*)

A Russian king of old

The Commandments of Islam, as laid down in the Qur'an and expounded by the Prophet of God, are permanent in nature and Muslims are required to observe them. Although these commandments may not be subjected to any kind of curtailment or amendment, in special cases they can certainly be waived.

Vladimir I of Russia (956-1015 ^{AD}) was the first King of that country to convert from idolatry to Christianity. Many of his subjects followed his lead and the idols which had been the objects of their worship were cast into rivers. An eleventh century Christian monk, named Jacob, has recorded the details of King Vladimir's conversion to Christianity. He writes, that the Russian King, having suffered a loss of faith in the polytheistic religion of his ancestors, summoned scholars of Judaism, Christianity and Islam in order to find out more about their respective religions.

According to Jacob's account, the Jewish theologians admitted, in the course of detailed discussions, that they, the Jewish people, had incurred the wrath of God and, in consequence, did not know their true abode either on earth or in heaven. Discouraged at this, Vladimir said that he had no need of such a religion.

After having the teachings of Islam explained to him by Muslim theologians, Vladimir became interested in Islam and was on the point of accepting that faith, when one fatal drawback emerged. "I am in the habit of drinking," he told the Muslim theologians, "I am ready to follow all the teachings of Islam – but drinking, – that, I am unable to forego." They informed him that Islam prohibited the drinking of wine and that if he was to accept Islam, he should have to give up this habit. He pleaded with them at great length to exempt him from the law forbidding wine-drinking, but the theologians could not bring themselves to agree. There the matter ended, and the Russian King refrained from entering the fold of Islam.

King Vladimir then held discussions with the Christian theologians, who proved themselves wiser and more tactful than their Muslim counterparts. Although unable to give the King complete satisfaction as to the tenets of their faith, they did agree that he would be allowed to continue drinking wine. Despite his reservations about Christianity in principle, he gave it his approval out of purely practical considerations. His adoption of the Christian faith was, as Professor Roberts puts it, "a turning-point in Russian history and culture. (*The Pelican History of the World*, by I.M. Roberts, p. 355). The future of Russia might well have lain in Islam, had it not been for a purely tactical error made by its missionaries.

The Muslim scholars who made this exposition of their religion were well-versed in the legal aspects of Islam, but appear to have been in the dark about its other aspects. With their concentration on what was

lawful and unlawful, they paid scant attention to the strategy to be employed in propagating the message of Islam. This explains their failure in the case of Vladimir I.

Wine-drinking is, of course, prohibited by Islam, but it should not be forgotten that at the very beginning, there was no such prohibition; this came at a later stage. For those who accepted Islam in the early stages of the Prophet's mission in Mecca, the teachings of the Prophet centred on the oneness of God and belief in prophethood, and it was to these tenets that Muslims were required to swear their allegiance. They were not commanded by the Prophet to give up drinking wine. In the early Mecca days, there were, therefore, some amongst the Muslims who despite their acceptance of Islam, continued the practice of drinking. It was only after they had emigrated to Medina – the final verse on prohibition having been revealed at that time – that they renounced this pernicious habit.

It is quite clear from this sequence of events that the propagation of Islam should not begin with a bald statement of the Islamic standpoint on the drinking of wine. The renunciation of this habit is not such a condition for admission to the fold of Islam that it should be laid down as a prerequisite, regardless of the circumstances. If it appears impossible for a potential convert to give up drinking at the very beginning, this problem can always be tackled at a later stage. It may be objected that this lenient attitude to drinking was acceptable only before the Qura'nic verse prohibiting it was revealed, and that now no further concessions are possible. This argument, however, does not stand up to inspection, for it does not tally with the Prophet's own methods.

In the course of his own mission, the Prophet was quite flexible on certain points whenever inflexibility would have harmed the cause of Islam. There is one very good example of this in the way he dealt with the Thaqef tribe, which hailed from Taif. In the year 9_{AH}, they sent a delegation to Medina to announce their acceptance of Islam, with the proviso, however, that they would neither pay *zakat* nor engage in *jihad*. At that time injunctions both on *zakat* and *jihad* had been revealed in the Qur'an, yet the Prophet accepted their conditions adding that in time they themselves would include both *zakat* and *jihad* in their practice of Islam.

Abu Da'ud relates this incident in his *Sunan*:

Wahab recounts how he asked Jabir about the Thaqef at the time of their swearing allegiance. Jabir told him that the Thaqef had imposed the condition on the Prophet of their not having to pay *sadaqah* or participate in *jihad*. He then heard the Prophet say that they would give *Sadaqah* and perform *Jihad* at a later stage, once they had entered the fold of Islam. (*Seera! Ibn Hisham Vol. IV. p. 56*).

The commandments of Islam, as laid down in the Qur'an and expounded by the Prophet of God, are permanent in nature and Muslims are required to observe them. Although these commandments may not be subject to any kind of curtailment or amendment, in special cases they can certainly be waived. Indeed, the need to be flexible in the imposition of Islamic injunctions is in itself an obligation which Islam requires us to recognize.

In propagating the message of Islam, one must never lose sight of this need to avoid rigidity. It has to be accepted that the adoption of Islam by an individual or a nation is a gradual process. When one is engaged in the preaching of Islam one must recognize that gradualness can be a virtue, and should accordingly, draw up a phased programme of action. The Prophet and his companions were keenly aware of the necessity to proceed step by step towards total Islamization. By virtue of this very awareness, they were able to spread the message of Islam from one end of the world to the other. It was at a later stage that Muslims neglected this aspect of their mission, thus hindering the further spread of Islam.

Position of woman in Shari'ah – 3

REMARK OF THE CHIEF JUSTICE

Giving his verdict in the Muhammad Ahmad – Shah Bano Case,¹ Mr. Y V Chandra Chud, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, has written a special note in which he says:

1. Criminal Appeal No. 103-1981 - dated April 23, 1985.

Some questions which arise under the ordinary civil and criminal law are of a far-reaching significance to large segments of society which have been traditionally subjected to unjust treatment. Women are one such segment. "*Na stree swatantramarhati*" (The woman does not deserve independence), said Manu, the law giver. And, it is alleged that the 'fatal point in Islam is the degradation of woman.' To the Prophet is ascribed the statement, hopefully wrongly, that 'woman was made from a crooked rib, and if you try to bend it straight, it will break; therefore, treat your wives kindly.'

I would like to make it clear that the phrase in this passage, 'hopefully wrongly' does not mean that this saying has been wrongly attributed to the Prophet. It means rather that although the Prophet said that the woman is born of a 'crooked rib,' those who want to establish equality between man and woman should take heart, as this saying of the Prophet was contrary to the fact. This phrase of the Chief Justice is meant to deny the statement itself and not the attribution.

Only a man of law can give a final opinion as to the relevance of this remark of the Chief Justice from the purely legal point of view, but it is certainly not correct from the academic point of view. He has quoted this saying of the Prophet to support his claim that Islam advocates the unjust treatment of a segment of society. Whereas, on the contrary, this saying enjoys men to treat women with justice. The remark of the honourable Chief Justice does apply to Manu's statement, but it does not apply at all to the sayings of the Prophet.

When it has been clearly stated that women should be treated gently, how can it be claimed, that unjust and unfair treatment of women was advocated in a saying of the Prophet, (as it clearly was in Manu's dictum).

So far as a woman's being like a rib is concerned, mention of this is made only to support fair treatment of women rather than the reverse. It has been clarified above that this was only an example. In view of the particular psychology of women, it was cited to show that if she was subjected to rough treatment, it would go against her nature and would result in perversion rather than reform.

In this saying of the Prophet the likening of woman to the rib was a simple metaphor. The misunderstanding arose because of the biblical statement was brought in to explain it. While this saying had nothing to do with the biblical conception of women, what has been said in the above *hadith* is a natural fact which has often been expressed in different ways, as in the words of Matthew Arnold: 'With women the heart argues, not the mind.'

CORRESPONDENCE

In response to the remark made by the former Chief Justice, Mr. Chandra Chud, in his verdict on the Muhammad Ahmad-Shah Bano case, we sent him a letter which is reproduced on the next page.

May 14, 1986

Mr. Y V Chandrachud

Ex-Chief Justice

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New Delhi 110022

Dear Mr. Chandrachud,

I am taking the liberty of addressing myself to you because, on going through your verdict on the Muhammad Ahmad-Shah Bano case, I find that one of the statements you make casts unfair aspersions on Islam. You allege that women have been 'traditionally subjected to unjust treatment, and that the 'fatal point in Islam is the degradation of woman.' To support this, you quote Manu as having stated that woman did not 'deserve independence,' and the Prophet of Islam as having said, 'Woman was made from a crooked rib, and, if you try to bend it straight, it will break; therefore, treat your wives kindly.'

While Manu's dictum bears out your statement, I must point out that you have badly misquoted the Prophet. Nowhere in the Hadith is it stated that woman was made from a crooked rib, this being an ancient Biblical version of God's creation of human life. The word 'rib' was used by the Prophet in a purely metaphorical sense and his actual words were: 'Woman is like a rib, if you try to straighten her out, she will break, so treat her kindly.'

The Encyclopaedia Britannica states: 'With respect to personality traits, men are characterized by greater aggressiveness, dominance and achievement motivation, women by greater dependency, a stronger social orientation and the tendency to be more easily discouraged by failure than men' (19/907).

Presumably the Prophet, with his great understanding of human nature, had a fine intuitive grasp of the fundamental, biological and psychological differences between men and women, particularly the latter's fragility and passivity – and, for this reason, found it necessary to admonish lesser men to treat their wives kindly.

I fail to see how 'the degradation of women' can ensue from such an injunction. It would be fitting, to say the least, if you were now to retract, or amend, your statement, now that this point has been clarified.

I remain,

Yours faithfully,

Wahiduddin Khan

President, The Islamic Centre

As is clear from the preceding discussion, this remark of the Chief Justice is wholly baseless from the academic point of view. But what is stranger still is the fact that when we drew his attention to this by this letter, he did not care to reply. We sent him this letter for the first time on 17 April, 86, by registered post. Having received no reply we sent a copy of this letter to him again on May 14, 1986, but again he did not respond. Then, after trying several times, we succeeded in contacting him on the telephone. We asked for an appointment with him, so that we could discuss this matter with him, but he excused himself and refused to comply with our request. Now we have no choice but to publish this letter without his reply.

SUMMARY

God 'created man's mate from the same soul' means simply that women are of the same species as men. God created them that way so that there should be harmony between the two sexes. If men and women had been derived from different species—if one had been made from fire, for instance, and the other from earth – then the two would have been unable to get on together. Family life would have lacked peace and harmony; men and women would have been unable to struggle hand in hand to build a better world.

As for the saying of the Prophet likening women to a rib, it is a parable illustrating the need to treat women gently on the basis of their particular, natural constitution. The Prophet Muhammad delivered this advice time and time again, in different words, and it is something that he himself practised throughout his life.

In the time of the Prophet, women used to attend the night prayer, and sometimes they used to take their small children along with them. The Prophet used to pay special attention to strict and full observance of prayer. Yet so great was his consideration for women that sometimes, when he heard babies crying, he would cut short the prayer. He once said: 'Sometimes I stand up for prayer, my intention being to make it a long one. Then I hear a baby crying. So I cut short the prayer, not wanting to make things difficult for the child's mother.'¹

1. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih, Kitab as-Salah, (Fath al-Bari, 2/160).*

THE STATUS OF WOMAN

In Islam, a woman enjoys the same status as that of a man. In the words of the Qur'an, 'You are members, one of another.'² There is no difference between man and woman as regards status, rights and blessings both in this world and in the hereafter. Both are equal participants so far as the carrying out of the functions of daily living is concerned. If Islam stresses the division of labour between the sexes rather than sexual equality, it is because it does not countenance the idea of either sex suffering from the feelings of degradation and inferiority resulting from any imitation of the opposite sex. As the Prophet once observed: 'Those men are cursed who try to resemble women, and those women are cursed who try to resemble men.'³

2. Qur'an, 3:195.
3. Al-Bukhari, Salt ill, *Kitab al-Libas*, (*Fatll al-Bari*, 10/273).

The biological division of human beings into male and female is the result of purposeful planning on the part of the Creator. And there can be no human progress without constant respect being shown for this division. Any attempt to cross the dividing line laid down by the Almighty is akin to breaking down the whole system of nature, a procedure which can lead only to destruction.

Man and woman in the eyes of Islam are not the duplicates of one another, but the complements, there being in each quite incontrovertible, biological differences which lead to the natural separation of sphere and occupation. This division of labour permits the shortcomings of one sex to be compensated for by the strengths of the other.

Islamic precepts for men and women are based on their respective, natural constitutions. It is now an established biological fact that there is a difference in their physiological structure, a difference which gears men to work which is external to the home, and women to a life led mainly indoors within the home. This biological difference has not only been the determining factor in the societal division of labour, but has also necessitated the framing of special Islamic laws to ensure justice for both sexes.

THE CONTRACT OF LIFE

The relationship formed by marriage in Islam is described in the Qur'an as a 'firm contract.'¹ It is exactly the same as any ordinary contract in that it is bilateral in nature; where it differs is in its spelling out of the rights and responsibilities which bind a man and a woman together in a vital partnership, making them companions for life. There is a saying of the Prophet Muhammad on this subject: 'Beware, your women have rights over you and you have rights over your women.'²

1. Qur'an, 4:21.
2. Ibn Majah, *Sunan*, *Kitab an-Nikah*, I/593.

WOMAN – SOURCE OF GOODNESS

Here are some verses from the Qur'an and some traditions which elaborate on this point.

Live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. If you take a dislike to them, it may well be that you dislike a thing which God has meant for your own abundant good.³

3. Qur'an, 4:19.

This verse draws our attention to the fact that nothing is perfect in this world and that apparent imperfection may conceal some virtue. If in certain respects a woman is imperfect, there will be other respects in which she is perfect: it is her plus points, rather than her minus points, on which attention

should be focussed. Only those can succeed in the outside world who have learned this lesson at home, that is, seeing light where there is darkness and discovering plus points along with minus points. Therein lies the secret of success in the modern world.

MOTHER IS MORE HONOURABLE

According to Abu Hurayrah, a man once came to the Prophet and asked him:

'O Messenger of God, who rightfully deserves the best treatment from me?'

'Your mother,' replied the Prophet.

'Who is next?' asked the man.

'Your mother,' said the Prophet.

'Who comes next?' the man asked again.

'Your mother,' replied the Prophet.

'Who is after that?' insisted the man.

'Your father,' said the noble Prophet.¹

I. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih, Kitab al-Adab (Fath al-Bari*, 10/329-330).

The projection of woman as the most honourable human being in the form of a mother makes it quite clear what sort of a society Islam wants to create. It is one in which a woman is, accorded the maximum honour and respect. A member of such a society, who shows full respect to a woman as a mother will, of necessity, become more and more caring in regard to other women. With the creation of such a mentality, women in general will share the status accorded to a mother at home.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The second Caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, once while addressing a gathering asked them to refrain from fixing heavy dowers in marriage. On hearing this, a woman stood up and, addressing the caliph on the pulpit said, as God Himself has said, 'If you have given much wealth to your women do not take anything from it.' On hearing what the woman had to say, 'Umar withdrew his words, saying, 'The woman is right, 'Umar is wrong.'

I. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, 9/167.

Here was a common woman criticising the ruler of an empire, and the latter withdrawing his words. The right of absolute freedom of expression as we find in this incident, is a clear indication that woman has been granted her full rights in Islamic society.

HOME MANAGEMENT IS NOT AN INFERIOR TASK

A certain woman called Nasibah once came to the Prophet Muhammad and said: 'O Messenger of God, Men have excelled in meriting the rewards of the Hereafter. They join the Friday prayer, attend congregations and perform *jihad*. Then what is left for us women to do?' The Prophet replied, 'O Nasibah, if your manner of living with your husband is proper and obedient, such conduct in itself is equal to all the actions performed by men, which you have just mentioned.'²

2. *Kanz al- 'Ummal*, 16/411.

In modern times, as a result of perverted thinking, managing a home is considered inferior to work done outside the home. But Islam gives the same place of honour to both kinds of work, it being a fact that both are equally important. On this score, neither man nor woman need have a superiority or an inferiority complex.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMAN IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIETY

According to Jabir ibn 'Abdullah, the Prophet once observed: 'The throne of Iblis (Satan), the chief of the devils, is situated above the seas, whence he sends his bands to lead human beings astray. To Iblis, the most worthy of the devils is the one who causes the greatest wickedness. The devils visit him as their chief to report their deeds to him,' and Iblis gives a hearing to all of them. On one occasion, Iblis remained unimpressed with their achievements, until one of the devils came and told him that he had pursued a husband and wife until he managed to separate them. He had achieved this by causing them to have doubts and misgivings about one another. Iblis was so overjoyed to hear this that he drew him to him in a close embrace, saying, 'Yes, you did it,' meaning that he had really managed to lead human beings astray.'¹

1. Muslim, *Sahih, Kitab Sifat al-Munafiqin wa Ahkamihim*. 4/2167

This *hadith* shows that Satan's greatest weapons in perverting human society are the conflict and discord which he creates between a husband and wife, resulting in their separation.

In ancient times, this phenomenon was not widespread, only a very limited number of people being afflicted by the evil of separation. However, in modern times the whole human race has come to be affected by exposure to new and misguided ideas about the freedom of woman and on unnatural equality of the sexes. It is as a result of these artificial concepts that the marital state has come to be looked down upon in developed societies, and men and women have begun to opt increasingly for divorce, even on the most minor provocations. In the wake of such divorces, a number of evils have followed, not the least of which is their baneful effect on the children, who, in a state of bewilderment at the separation of their parents, often join gangs of criminals. Then the discarding of family bonds has given rise to a general

atmosphere of permissiveness, which in turn has resulted in the spread of fatal diseases. The widespread loosening, or even destruction of family bonds has become the greatest problem afflicting modern societies.

When the rot of perversion sets in at home, the whole of society is affected and, ultimately, it is the entire nation which has to bear the brunt of it. The only reason for this widespread moral degeneration is the violation of the sanctity of marriage, which has come to be regarded as an unwelcome bond.

WOMEN IN POSITIONS OF POWER

A film called 'Kisses for my President,' made in Hollywood in 1964, tells the story of a married, American woman who is elected the U.S. President. She almost immediately becomes pregnant and finds herself faced with so many problems because of this that she decides to leave the presidential home and go and live in her own home. Finally she resigns from the office of president. Even the modern world still finds it unimaginable that a woman should be given a high government office. In a poll taken in 1972, the majority of American voters said that they would rather have a black man than a woman as president. The idea of a woman president was ridiculed. Someone joked: 'When the lady president delivers her child, the hospital bulletin will have to announce that "the President and baby are doing well.'"¹

1. *Time* magazine, March 20, 1972.

Opinion polls were conducted on this particular issue in 1987 in the U.S. Reuter reported from Washington that according to a poll conducted for a women's rights group, nearly one third of American voters believed men to be better suited than women to the role of U.S. President. The study released by the National

Women's Political Caucus (NWPC), said only eight per cent of those polled believed a woman could do better than a man in the White House, 40 per cent said there was no inherent difference between the sexes, and 31 per cent believed men made better presidents. The poll, conducted by the Washington-based HickmanMaslin political research firm, showed that women were credited with being more capable of dealing with social issues, such as poverty, health care, education, drug abuse, and civil rights.¹

1. *The Times of India* (New Delhi), August 14, 1987.

The Persian emperor, Chosroes died during the life of the Prophet. His courtiers crowned Chrosroes' daughter queen. On hearing this news, the Prophet said: 'A nation which makes a woman its ruler will not make progress.'²

2. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih, Kitab ai-Maghazi*, (*Fath ai-Bari*, 8/104-105).

The researches of the modern age now testify to the truth of this time-honoured principle laid down by Islam. Fourteen hundred years ago, Islam held that a woman was not fit for so high a position as that of a sovereign. While, until very recently, this could have been regarded as a mere assertion made a very long time ago, today it is accepted as a scientific fact. What the Prophet had said as a matter of inspiration has now been established, after a long period of study and research, as a reality. This is clear proof that Islamic principles are based on facts of nature and not just on supposition and conjecture.

THE TESTIMONY OF WOMAN

The testimony of two women is regarded as equal to that of one man. While dealing with matters of debt, the Qur'an says:

When you contract a debt for a fixed period, put it in writing. And call in two male witnesses from among you, but if two men cannot be found, then one man and two women whom you judge fit to act as witnesses; so that if either of them forgets, the other will remember.¹

1. Qur'an, 2:282.

Recent research has testified to this law mentioned in the Qur'an as being perfectly natural. A UPI report quotes a Soviet scientist as saying that 'men have a greater ability to memorize and process mathematical information than women, but females are better with words.' Speaking to the Tass news agency, Dr Vladimir Konovalov said that 'men dominate in mathematical subjects due to the peculiarities of their memory. The stronger sex shows greater difficulties in processing and adapting language material.'²

2. *The Times of India* (New Delhi), January 18, 1985.

As indicated in the Qur'anic verse initially quoted, whenever there is to be any delay in payment after the conclusion of a business transaction, there must be witnesses to this, either two men or one man and two women. The phrase 'so that if either of them forgets the other will remember' makes it quite clear that in such credit dealings, what has to be considered next in importance to justice is memory. When biological studies have shown a woman's memory to be weaker than a man's, it is quite in accordance with the facts of nature to stipulate that there should be two female witnesses in place of one man. This command thus sets a value upon memory per se. This is a matter of practical requirement, and does not discriminate against women or grant superiority to men.

AN ADDITIONAL, NOT A SUPERIOR QUALITY

Here is a verse of the Qur'an which reads: 'Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other.'³

3. Qur'an, 4:34.

Fadilah is the Arabic word used in the scriptures to indicate the additional, masculine quality of protectiveness. For a household to be properly run, it should, of necessity, have a guardian. Guardianship is rightly entrusted to the family member who is best qualified to undertake this responsibility – namely, the husband, for protectiveness is a virtue which has been granted by nature in greater measure, to men than to women. Far from mentioning absolute masculine superiority, the above-quoted verse only implies that man is the master in the home because of the additional attributes with which he has been endowed by nature.

Faddala ba'dahum 'ala ba'd is an Arabic expression meaning 'excelled some on other,' 'which occurs several times in the Qur'an. For instance, various kinds of crops and fruits grow from the same soil and water. Of this the Qur'an says: 'And in the land, there are adjoining plots: vineyards and com fields and palm-groves, the single and the clustered. Yet We make some excel others in taste. Surely in this there are signs for men of understanding.'¹

1. Qur'an, 13:4.

The following is an excerpt from a commentary on this verse by 'Abdullah Yusuf' Ali, well known commentator on the Qur'an: 'The date palm, the crops of food grains, and the grape-vine are all fed by the same kind of water: yet how different the harvests which they yield! And that applies to all vegetation. The fruit or eatable produce may vary in shape, size, colour, flavour, etc. in endless variety.'²

2. 'Abdullah Yusuf' Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*, p.673.

All commentators on the Qur'an have placed emphasis on this difference and variety, rather than on some fruits being superior, in an absolute sense, to some others. That is to say, each fruit has some particular quality to it as regards colour, and taste, which is not found in other fruits. Similarly there are differences between men and women. Just as women have uniquely feminine qualities, so also do men have uniquely masculine qualities.

That is why God enjoins us not to be jealous of others' qualities:

Do not covet the favours by which God has exalted some of you above others. To men is allotted what they earn, and to women what they earn.'¹

1. Qur'an, 4:32.

That is, each has been blessed with different sets of attributes. So what others have should not make one jealous. On the contrary, one should avail of whatever talents have been bestowed upon one and, in the process, make a positive contribution to family and social life.

It is a fact that women are not physically as strong as men, but their physical weakness in no way implies their inferiority to men. The eyes are the most delicate parts of our body, while the nails by comparison are extremely hard. That does not mean that the nails are superior to the eyes.

Just as two different kinds of fruit will differ in colour, taste shape and texture, without one being superior or inferior to the other, so also do men and women have their different qualities which distinguish the male from the female without there being any question of superiority or inferiority. If men and women have been endowed with different capacities, it is so that they will play their respective divinely pre-determined roles in life with greater ease and effectiveness. Certain feminine abilities will be superior to certain masculine abilities, and vice versa, simply because their natural spheres of application are different. Success in life for both men and women can be attained only if they devote themselves to the particular set of activities which has been pre-ordained for them in God's scheme of things.

SENSELESS WORD OF A WOMAN

Nadira Begum Qurayshi from Bilaspur in Maharashtra (India) was divorced by her husband after the birth of a daughter. She petitioned the court to be entitled to receive a monthly maintenance allowance from her former husband. According to a newspaper report when asked why in the matter of maintenance, she chose to follow in the footsteps of Shah Bano of Indore, (Under Section 125, Cr. P.c.) she retorted, 'What has Islam done for me that I should follow its tenets?' Neither the judge nor the lawyers were able to persuade Mrs. Qurayshi to withdraw her case. She rejected Mr. Qurayshi's offer to take her and her daughter back. She then called upon the court to order her former husband to give her a Rs. 500 monthly allowance. Unlike Mrs. Shah Bano, she is young, just thirty years of age, and a graduate.

But her attitude is not that of an educated person and the answer she gave certainly showed her ignorance of her religion, she would have realised that whatever women have today is the gift of Islam. Even a woman having the temerity to question publicly what Islam had done for her is also due to Islam. Prior to its advent, a woman being bereft of all status, would not have dared to speak freely in public.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

31 July 1994

The most worthwhile work is preaching the word of God

The Prophet said: "The God should grant guidance, through you, to just one person is better for you than everything on which the sun rises."